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RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0597
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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (Deleting SENSITIVE Caption)

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SUBJECT: CODEL HASTINGS' JANUARY 8 VISIT TO LEBANON

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During a January 8 visit to Lebanon, a delegation headed by Representative Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL) met with President Michel Sleiman, Prime Minister Saad Hariri and Foreign Minister Ali el Chami. Representative Hastings reiterated Congressional support for Lebanon's democratic institutions and discussed the Lebanese-U.S. bilateral relationship, regional peace efforts, and cooperation between the U.S. and Lebanese militaries. Sleiman and Chami decried the new TSA guidelines for air travelers, and both objected strenuously to House Resolution 2278, which would target satellite providers that broadcast Hizballah's Al-Manar television station. Hariri cast doubt on Israeli commitment to peace and tied U.S. credibility in the Arab world to progress in its peace efforts. Representative HQB-Bkc htghjAjdividuals and organizations working with the Iraqi refugees living in Lebanon. End Summary.

SLEIMAN PROTESTS NEW TSA REGULATIONS

¶2. (C) President Sleiman stressed his deep concern about the newly announced TSA guidelines for inspection of air travelers and HR 2278 (passed December 8 and sent to the Senate), which targets satellite providers broadcasting Hizballah's Al-Manar station. On the TSA guidelines, Sleiman protested that Lebanon's safety record at Beirut's Rafiq Hariri International Airport was excellent, and he described the new security procedures as economically injurious. On HR 2278, Sleiman called on the U.S. to protect freedom of speech and not penalize those who criticize the United States.

¶3. (C) Sleiman called for a two-state solution to the Palestinian issue and predicted that new "resistance groups" would form without attention to social justice and economic development. Representative Hastings asserted that weapons smuggling undermined the security of Lebanon and the entire region, and he asked President Sleiman to consider joining the Mediterranean Partnership of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to promote a "powerful dialog with both like-minded nations, as well as others." Sleiman categorized weapons smuggling as a Lebanese issue, and he claimed that the true threat to Lebanon was not Hizballah but rather radicalized Palestinian factions, which

the LAF was combating.

PM DECLARES THAT LEBANON IS UNITED

¶4. (C) PM Hariri described his recent visit to Damascus as vital for engaging Syria on a state-to-state basis and improving regional relationships. The new national unity government, Hariri asserted, would help Lebanon break free from "hateful, confessional government," and Hezbollah had to play a role since it represented a significant domestic constituency. Hariri described his plan to emphasize economic reform, pointing out that without jobs, some would choose the ready option of terror. Assistance from the U.S. to establish the LAF as a modern, capable military was a vital priority, he underscored.

¶5. (C) Only the USG had the influence to push Israel to cooperate for peace and stability, Hariri maintained, and he predicted that Hamas would weaken should a two-state solution with a shared capital in Jerusalem be achieved. Even so, he accused Israel of "not being interested in peace, but only in the process of peace" while escalating tensions with its warlike tone and by violating Lebanese airspace and water borders daily. Representative Hastings, who congratulated Lebanon for its new role on the UN Security Council, described the benefits of OSCE partnership as a valuable channel for dialog and mentioned that he had made the same points with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Prime Minister Hariri concluded with an admonition that Lebanon would be united if Israel attacked south Lebanon again.

CHAMI DEFENDS MEDIA FREEDOM

¶6. (C) Foreign Minister Ali el Chami outlined Lebanon's opposition to HR 2278 as an infringement on "media liberty in Lebanon and across the Arab world." Chami stressed that Lebanese law already prohibited incitement by media outlets and insisted that Al-Manar was subject to Lebanese law. On the new TSA guidelines, Chami criticized the inclusion of Lebanon on the list of countries subjected to additional security scrutiny, describing them as contrary to human rights. Representative Hastings pointed out that in effect citizens of all countries -- including himself -- would be subjected to the same scrutiny.

¶7. (C) Chami praised President Obama's focus on peace in the Middle East, and he reiterated GOL support for the Palestinians' right of return as part of a two-state solution. Chami, who argued for Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Lebanese territory, cited daily Israeli violations of Lebanese air space as evidence of Israel's disinterest in implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1701. Once Lebanon's land was liberated, he claimed, there would be no further need for the "Resistance," which would be resolved in the forum of the National Dialogue. Chami concluded by congratulating President Obama for his Nobel Peace Prize, and asserting that Lebanon would try to "serve justice and peace for all people based on equity and equality" from its new seat on the UN Security Council. Representative Hastings emphasized that the U.S. was committed to a sovereign, stable and prosperous Lebanon and that we will work cooperatively to help the GOL strengthen its institutions.

IRAQI REFUGEE ROUNDTABLE

¶8. (C) CODEL Hastings also attended a roundtable on Iraqi refugees hosted by the Catholic Relief Services (CRS). CRS provided an overview of its programs and invited Iraqi refugees helped by a U.S.-funded CRS project to recount their experiences for the CODEL. Representative Hastings underscored his support for Iraqi refugees.

¶9. (U) This cable was not cleared by CODEL Hastings.
SISON